Social Media Policy

The term 'social media' has risen to prominence over the past 5 years as internet use has become more and more prolific across the world. The term is often used to describe a number of different sites, services and channels – many of which can seem confusing and irrelevant.

In the context of Scouting, 'social media' is important for a few key reasons. First and foremost, the rise of 'profile sites' such as Facebook. MySpace etc. amongst our young member base has grown exponentially – recent statistics show that 66% of teenagers have a presence on one or other of these sites.

As we move into the 21st century, more and more people look to the internet for news both locally and nationally, social networks such as Facebook and Twitter provide an excellent and interactive soapbox for us to showcase all that is good about Scouting – from the opportunities and experiences of our young members through to the exemplary work our section leaders and adult helpers do week in, week out.

Interactive networks such as Facebook also provide an excellent platform for updating parents and young people about an activity, event or trip – providing a free, extensible, and secure platform on which to post photos, updates, and information for those not on the trip to see.

Why use it?

For our young people and their families, it is becoming an expectation that we communicate in a way in which they are both used to and comfortable with. The use of social media channels and social networks is therefore key in ensuring that Scouting stays relevant in the 21st century.

It's well known that the use of social media has grown phenomenally in recent years, and that this provides us with opportunities to bring together our members, as well as showcasing the successes of Scouting to a wider audience.

The use of social media in itself is not an aim or an outcome; social media can be used to support other purposes and should always be kept in context. By deciding clearly what the purpose should be of using social media, it will make it more manageable to set up, target, operate and evaluate.

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Some examples of the use of social media has been:

- Making use of Facebook Pages during District Camps, other Section events and promotion of District events like Blackpool Gang Show.
- The main Blackpool Scouts twitter account ([@BlackpoolScouts](#)) has been bringing together tweets from groups, young people and adult volunteers all over the District – showing the breadth of Scouting activity to a wide audience.

Who should drive our social media presence?

At each level of Scouting, there is a part that can be played in our social media presence. The key mantra behind the use of these services is to push great content out to as many people as possible, and get very honest, real-time feedback on it.

Section leaders and assistant section leaders

- You know what your section will be doing this term, so take a look at your schedule and pick out some key events or activities that you think demonstrate greatness in Scouting, or give the young people in your section opportunities that they might not otherwise get.
- If you are managing a social media channel directly then you can post content to it as and when (see 'What should I post?' below). If you don't directly have access to a social media channel, pass the information on to whoever in your group for them to post.

Group Leadership Teams

- The group exec has a unique view over all sections within a group, and can easily spot examples of exceptional Scouting, cross-section collaboration, or joint ventures with other groups and units locally, nationally, and internationally.

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- Make someone within the exec responsible for collating this information and either posting it to social media channels at the appropriate time or passing it along to someone within the group, District that can.

Young People

- Young leaders and Explorer Scouts are well placed to both understand the uses of social media channels and understand the types of content that work well on them. Make use of this by asking them to assist you in collecting content – however, giving them direct access to posting on behalf of an official scouting channel is discouraged.
- Younger Scouts, Cubs and Beavers should generally not be involved directly in driving our social media presence.

How should I choose which social media channel to use?

There are many social media channels in existence, each with its own set of features and target audience. The two that stand out as the most beneficial in the context of Scouting are Facebook and Twitter, for the reasons highlighted below.

Facebook
Accessible via a web browser in website format, Facebook is a social network with over 600 million users worldwide. Users may create a personal profile, add other users as friends and exchange messages, including automatic notifications when they update their profile. Additionally, users may join common interest user groups, organized by workplace, school, or college, or other characteristics.

In the context of Scouting, Facebook's platform for creating interest groups (called pages) is powerful – a 'page' can be created for a specific event and be managed by designated adults, who then have the ability to upload content to the page without appearing as themselves (posts take on the name of the page, rather than the individual who posts the content). Users of Facebook can then 'like' the page – which means updates made to it will appear in their news feed, and they will be able to interact with any content posted to the page by 'liking' and commenting.

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This is useful for specific trips, events or activities, where a sense of community can be maintained long after the event is over and content can be kept indefinitely. It is also useful on a group level – a group or section can have a page which contains content created during regular meetings, in an effort to help families engage with the community spirit of Scouting all week long, from wherever they are.

Twitter

Accessible through a variety of methods that include mobile apps, software clients, and websites, Twitter is a 'microblogging' network on which users post tweets, which are text-based posts of up to 140 characters displayed on the user's profile page. Tweets are publicly visible by default. Users may subscribe to other users' tweets – this is known as following and subscribers are known as followers.

Twitter differs from Facebook in that it doesn't have activity pages, and users don't have to register to see updates. This makes Twitter an excellent platform to promote the general ethos of Scouting, show off the great opportunities that we give our young members, and highlight the fantastic work that our adult members do. Twitter allows you to post links to photos and videos via third party services, but is designed for short, sharp messages that get the point across succinctly.

What should I put on there?

While based online, social networking sites differ little from in-person speech or written word when it comes to telling the story of Scouting. When it comes to giving a positive impression of Scouting, what we say is as important as how we look. People often make a judgment not just on what we say, but the way we say it. If we all use the same, positive tone in our communications, our Scouting personality will shine through.

Positive language is important, whether you're posting to Facebook or writing a tweet. For more information on using positive language in Scouting communications, see the official guide at http://www.scouts.org.uk/comms_centre/brand_aware.php?pageid=2701.

There are also certain ways to phrase things and certain words that work in different situations. If you're ever in doubt, official style & language guidelines are also available from the Scout website at http://www.scouts.org.uk/cms.php?pageid=1332

What about pictures and videos?

Facebook and Twitter both lend themselves to rich media – and including photographs and videos in status updates and tweets is a great way to bring home the key messages of fun, adventure and doing great things for young people.

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When uploading photos and videos to social networking services, it is essential that you follow the guidelines laid out in the fact sheet "Photographing and Video Recording Scout Events" at http://www.scoutbase.org.uk/library/hqdocs/facts/docs/fs295428.doc

How do I stay safe?

Whilst it is important that Scouting has a presence on Social Networking Sites, it is important to make sure that the safety of both you and all young people involved in Scouting is paramount.

Never enter into a private discussion channel with a young person using a social networking site – for example, private Facebook messages or Direct Messages on Twitter. This is essentially the same as being alone in a room with someone – a situation in which we should never be. If you need to have a discussion with some privacy, use email.

Remember that everything that you publish to social networking sites can potentially be public information – so never post your own personal details like full name, phone number, etc.

For more information and guidance see the fact sheet "Social Networking Sites and Scouting"

There are also a wealth of resources for staying safe online as part of the 'think u know' campaign, available from www.thinkuknow.co.uk

Where can I get help?

If you have specific questions, comments or concerns, you can contact the Blackpool Scouts Media and Communications team by emailing comms@blackpoolscouts.org.uk.